

## **Discussion Paper No. 2 of 12**

# **Transportation and land use**

Note: The purpose of the discussion papers in this series is to provide a range of strategy options to start discussions for possible solutions for some key growth and quality of life issues. Ideas represented in each paper have been written by agency staff and do not necessarily reflect the department's position.

## **Introduction**

The kind of development and land uses that occur make a difference in how easily people and goods can get to where they need to go. In fast-growing regions of the state, traffic congestion is a frustrating transportation problem. Moving freight and agricultural products is often difficult in slower-growing regions. Everywhere, communities want to maintain or improve ways of getting around. Since endless sources of money for transportation are impossible, other solutions are needed.

## **Background**

Washington's population is likely to increase more than one million by 2015 and more than 2.1 million by 2025. If current trends of increasing auto use for each person continue, it will mean a huge burden on our road system. At the same time, some rural areas lack a basic transportation infrastructure to move agricultural products quickly and attract other business opportunities. In either case, when goods cannot be shipped to market quickly, it hurts the economy. Also when people have to spend a big portion of their income or time on driving, quality of life slips.

The state's Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board has made recommendations to address infrastructure needs for moving products to and from marketplaces. (See *1999 Activities and Recommendations Report* from the board produced by the Washington State Department of Transportation.) A less-discussed topic related to freight mobility is land use. The way we use land makes a difference in how roads and railways can be built. For example, when a county or city allows residential development that would block access to future industrial development, providing the needed transportation facilities for industry becomes very expensive or even impossible. Solutions for freight mobility may need to include how to avoid conflicting land uses near transportation corridors.

In most regions of the state, the increase in automobile trips is far outstripping population growth. No doubt, some road improvements are needed. But building enough roads to allow easy, fast, safe driving for everyone, regardless of where they live or work, is not financially feasible. In addition, roads do not serve everyone. About one-third of the nation's population, especially the young and old, do not drive.

More driving would also mean more air and water pollution. Air quality has suffered in Washington because of vehicle emissions. It is partially why the view of Mount Rainier has become hazy, and air pollution is likely to exceed federal standards in the near future. More room for driving would require more pavement for parking and streets. That takes away from land where housing and commercial and industrial buildings could be located and adds to drainage problems in watersheds. Alternative solutions for the congestion problem include ways to reduce the number and length of auto trips as our population grows. For example, studies show that compact development and mixed uses (apartments over retail space) generally mean fewer or shorter auto trips, compared to sprawling development.

The state's Growth Management Act (GMA), created in 1990, calls on local communities fully planning under the GMA to rethink the old approach to transportation planning. Transportation plans must be guided by the community's land use plan. Regions are to agree on a framework for transportation facilities and strategies.

As part of GMA planning, communities decide their land use and community vision for the future and what part transportation plays in it. At the county-wide level, cities and counties agree on broad transportation facility needs and priorities. At the local level, communities look at how people and freight will be moved from place to place, what destinations people choose, and what types of transportation will be offered. This becomes part of the local comprehensive plan. Most counties and cities fully planning under the GMA have completed their initial plans within the last several years and will be revising them, as necessary, by 2002.

Regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) develop regional transportation plans. The regional plan, local plans, and county-wide planning policies are to be consistent. RTPOs certify that the transportation elements in local comprehensive plans are consistent with the regional transportation plan. Some RTPOs have more resources and interest than others do in coordinating plans among local jurisdictions.

The growth management emphasis is on developing and linking many community systems – transit, walking, trains, biking, ferries, freight, flight, and automobiles – into a seamless transportation system that maximizes access and equity for everyone. Communities also are developing policies and ordinances for the level of service they will provide for transportation facilities, for commute trip reduction, for concurrency (i.e., having adequate facilities for development), and for transportation demand management.

In 1998, the GMA and other laws were amended to specifically recognize transportation facilities and services of statewide significance. Local jurisdictions are required to include these in their comprehensive plans, along with level of service standards, to measure how well they are performing. Such updates are to be completed by December 2000.

The Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation has been preparing a series of recommendations for transportation needs. Some of the draft reports offer recommendations that are closely related to achieving Smart Growth. For example, the following policy changes are being discussed:

- Zoning revisions to allow mixed-use development.
- Zoning for increases in density.
- Modifications to building setback requirements.
- Transfer of development rights to increase density in some areas while protecting open space elsewhere.
- Modification of parking requirements.
- Expedited permitting to encourage projects that meet specified criteria.

This paper focuses on the connection between land use and transportation for Smart Growth, with special attention to congestion relief and freight mobility. Other related needs for Smart Growth include:

- Safety improvements for roads, sidewalks, and other facilities.

- Need for regional and state coordination. (See Smart Growth Discussion Paper No. 11 *Regional and State Coordination*).
- Concurrency ordinances that meet community goals.
- Local parking strategies.
- Funding.
- Land use strategies for efficient transportation.
- Mobility for people who cannot drive or who do not own cars.

Part of dealing with all of these issues is making sure the land use patterns allow efficient transportation choices. Another part is ensuring efficient transportation is available to help businesses grow and to help people get to where they need to go. Ensuring good transportation choices for everyone means growing smart – making sensible land use choices and investing in efficient transportation to meet different needs.

### **Strategy options**

Here are some ideas that could be considered as part of a local, regional, or statewide strategy for Smart Growth.

A. Reduce vehicle trips by:

1. Making transit more convenient and user-friendly.
2. Providing infrastructure to make it easy to walk and/or bike to places.
3. Encouraging transit- or pedestrian-oriented development (i.e., compact development that clusters housing, shops, schools, offices, parks, and other uses near each other).
4. Continuing or enhancing commute-trip reduction programs.
5. Adjusting pricing of transportation infrastructure and service use to reflect actual use.

B. Give highest priority to transportation improvements that will help achieve Smart Growth.

C. Consider funding options – such as toll roads, congestion pricing, mileage-based fees, or impact fees – for new transportation facilities.

D. Offer awards or incentives to developers, bankers, and communities that use Smart Growth techniques.

E. Increase public awareness about choices people can make for land use and transportation and how that affects quality of life.

F. Encourage a jobs/housing balance.

G. Establish new partnerships for regional or regional/state coordination on planning, priorities, and projects.

H. Provide more assistance to RTPOs to evaluate transportation options and ensure an efficient, multimodal transportation network.

I. Provide a land use/transportation center that can do research and provide information for communities and regions on alternative ways to reduce congestion, enable freight movement, achieve concurrency,

help land use and transportation choices work together better, coordinate between state agencies, and meet goals for Smart Growth.

### **Possible performance measures**

One or more measures could be used to track transportation efforts and their success in providing for Smart Growth. Examples include:

1. Change in how much driving people do (e.g., increase or decrease in vehicle miles per capita annually) in metropolitan areas.
2. Number of communities that are identified as “transit- or walker-friendly.”
3. Percentage of population that says transportation needs are being adequately met.
4. Transit trips per person.
5. Number of lane miles of city, county, and state roads in need of repair.
6. Percentage of residents in metropolitan areas who commute one way within 30 minutes.
7. Ability to move goods and services efficiently in key transportation corridors.

Comments on the above topic are welcomed and should be addressed to Shane Hope, Managing Director, Growth Management Program, Washington State Community, Trade and Economic Development, PO Box 48300, Olympia, WA 98504-8300, web: <http://smartgrowth.wa.gov>, or by e-mail at [juliek@cted.wa.gov](mailto:juliek@cted.wa.gov).